

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD)  
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION (WRAC)  
LAKE OKEECHOBEE COMMITTEE MEETING – January 25, 2006  
Harborside Event Center, Ft. Myers, FL, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
MEETING REPORT – February 1, 2006**

**INTRODUCTION:**

- **This is a summary of the sixth WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee meeting.**
- Committee Chair and SFWMD Governing Board member Alice Carlson introduced City of Ft. Myers Mayor James Humphrey and Lee County Commission Chair Tammy Hall who welcomed the Committee to Ft. Myers and Lee County.
- The committee heard presentations about:
  - Lake System Operations
  - Lake Inflows, Outflows and Phosphorous Loads
  - Water Storage on Private Lands
  - Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Restoration Plan Overview
  - Water Storage on Public Lands
  - WSE Schedule Revision Process Update
  - Lake Okeechobee Committee Meeting Schedule - 2006
- Lake Okeechobee water level was 15.32' on 1/25/06.
- Lake Okeechobee Committee presentations will be posted to <http://www.sfwmd.gov>, "Governing Board/WRAC".

**ISSUES/DISCUSSION BY COMMITTEE:**

- **Member Issues:**
  - Lake Okeechobee Watershed Plan (CERP) alternatives selection:
    - need more information on phosphorous reduction alternatives
    - need to revisit alternatives that have been dropped
    - need to schedule presentation for committee and WRAC agendas
    - need to restore sense of urgency to the LOWP report, esp. re: water storage and management, and fire management.
  - Provide to committee, copies of EAA Storage documentation from C&SF Restudy and/or Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida.
  - Lake Okeechobee fishery is on its "deathbed"; need to get lake level down and better manage for fish production.
  - WRAC and committee should have strong role in land use planning for surface water management.

- Upcoming lake and estuary recovery projects, and WSE Schedule revisions must consider forecasts for wet and dry cycles.
- The Corps of Engineers will develop plan for Spring 2006 releases.
- A “Think Piece” by Ken Todd was distributed to committee members.
- Need to evaluate costs of implementing TMDLs (Total Maximum Daily Loads) for the lake.
- **Lake Water Operations Update – Discussion:**
  - Changes proposed for the “WSE” lake regulation schedule will evaluate methods to manage the lake at lower levels.
  - Nearly four times as much water has been discharged over the recent wet cycle as was discharged by 1995. A presentation is needed on the wet versus dry conditions and problems should be rectified as soon as possible.
  - Lake regulation revisions must consider supply side management issues and concerns.
- **Lake Inflows/Outflows and Phosphorous Loads – Discussion:**
  - Need to include information on timelines of the inflows/outflows. Response: information will be provided.
- **Water Storage on Private Land and Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery Plan Update – Discussion:**
  - Issues discussed included: Environmental Resource Permit criteria, removal of sediment from the lake, the need for additional public and private land for water storage, and, development of urban and agricultural “Best Management Practices” to better control stormwater runoff.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

- Estero Bay is designated a National Estuary. Red tide and blue/green algae blooms are hurting the tourism based economy of the area.
- High water discharges from the lake are harming the estuaries – the quality of local waters is terrible. Urge clean-up of the lake and estuaries. Shared adversity is important.
- Need to mimic natural and seasonal flows as CERP and LOER are implemented.

- There are no fish or crabs left in Tarpon Bay. Cannot see the bottom in 2' of water. It has been getting progressively worse year after year and no one is doing anything about it. It makes people very angry.
- PURRE Water Coalition has seen issues about discharges to the Caloosahatchee ignored. The Caloosahatchee and adjacent estuaries have been ignored as important regional resources. Need to clean up the water.
- Pine Island Sound included three Aquatic Preserves. There is an urgent need to clean up the quality of the water.
- Discharges from the lake to the Caloosahatchee river are devastating the environment and the tourism economy of the region.
- The Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge is suffering severe damage from lake water discharges.
- With all the damage to the local waters, suggestion made that agriculture consider planting more water tolerant crops like rice. Need to store more water in the EAA.
- Need to protect the environment of Southwest Florida, especially the beaches. Red Tide, blue/green algae and Red Algae blooms are ruining the beaches and adjacent waters.
- Economic impacts to Sanibel/Captiva Islands from high lake water discharges have been significant.
- LOER and Acceler8 are not enough – need at least 1 million acre feet of additional storage. It can and needs to be done.
- Need key biological indicators from the Caloosahatchee River and the estuaries to help monitor impacts.
- Many communities want to assist the SFWMD and Corps of Engineers in finding the right solutions to improve water quality.

**Water Storage on Public Lands** – presentation was made and questions answered.

**WSE Lake Okeechobee Water Level Regulation Schedule Revision Process Update** – presentation was made and questions answered.

**The committee reviewed and approved the 2006 meeting schedule.**